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Human rights questions: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Question of enforced or involuntary disappearances

Report of the Secretary-General**

1. At its fifty-third session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 53/150 of 9 December 1998 entitled "Question of enforced or involuntary disappearances", in which it requested the Secretary-General to keep it informed of the steps he takes to secure the widespread dissemination and promotion of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, proclaimed by its resolution 47/133 of 18 December 1992, and to submit to it at its fifty-fifth session a report on the steps taken to implement the resolution.

2. The General Assembly also reaffirmed that any act of enforced disappearance is an offence to human dignity and a grave and flagrant violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed and developed in other international instruments in this field, as well as a violation of the rules of international law. The General Assembly reiterated its invitation to all Governments to take appropriate legislative or other steps to prevent and suppress the practice of enforced disappearances, in keeping with the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and to take action to that end at the national and regional levels and in cooperation with the United Nations, including through technical assistance. It also encouraged States to provide concrete information on measures taken to give effect to the Declaration and obstacles encountered, and requested all States to consider the possibility of disseminating the text of the Declaration in their respective national languages and to facilitate its dissemination in local languages.

3. In conformity with resolution 53/150, the Department of Public Information, United Nations Secretariat, has undertaken several activities, including distribution of the full text of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, published by the former Centre for Human Rights of the Secretariat. The text continues to be distributed, through United Nations information centres, to United Nations peacekeeping offices and the specialized agencies of the United Nations.

4. In addition, the Department's Public Liaison Service at Headquarters makes the Declaration available to the general public and educational institutes, upon request. The text of the Declaration is also available on the United Nations web site on the

* A/55/150.

** In accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/248, sect. C, para. 1, this report is being submitted on 1 August 2000 so as to include as much updated information as possible.

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Internet (www.un.org), under the section on General Assembly resolutions.

5. In the field, the Department's network of information centres and services and United Nations offices have copies of publications containing the Declaration in their reference libraries for use by interested academicians, researchers and students. They also distribute copies to media and non-governmental organizations and at special events such as the annual celebration of Human Rights Day and activities to mark the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

6. In 1999 and 2000, the Department of Public Information prepared background press releases for members of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances of the Commission on Human Rights at the end of its annual sessions at Headquarters. During the current biennium, the Department will produce special media information packets and a background brochure on the question of enforced disappearances. Every opportunity will be used to promote the elements of the Declaration in briefings and events dealing with the United Nations and human rights at Headquarters, Geneva and throughout the network of United Nations information centres and services.

7. The Declaration has also been actively distributed by the field offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to local non-governmental organizations and other interested parties. The Declaration is also included as part of the background for training projects on the administration of justice being developed in the framework of the human rights' advisory services, technical assistance and information programme.

8. The Secretary-General recalls that the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has been entrusted by the Commission on Human Rights with the task of providing appropriate assistance in the implementation by States of the Declaration, in addition to its original role to act as a channel of communication between families of the disappeared persons and the Governments concerned. Governments and non-governmental organizations have cooperated with the Working Group, providing information on the obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Declaration and facilitating its dissemination.

Notes

[1] See Fact Sheet No. 6 (Rev.2).